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## NOTES ON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

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### AMERICAN CITIES.

*National Convention of Mayors and Councilmen.*—The first National Convention of Mayors and Councilmen of cities of the United States was held at Columbus, O., during the four days from September 28 to October 1, inclusive. As a result of this meeting a permanent association has been formed for the purpose of conducting research work and annual discussions on municipal affairs. The general subjects discussed at the meeting were the organization, function and operation of the police and fire departments; the relation of the municipality to the gas and water supply and street railways, and the general subject of street lighting, street cleaning, street paving and drainage. Among the special papers prepared were those by Josiah Quincy, Mayor of Boston, on "Municipal Affairs as Administered in Boston;" Hazen S. Pingree, Governor of Michigan, on "Out-door Relief by Municipalities," and "The Federal Plan of Municipal Government," by Dr. Washington Gladden, of Columbus.

**New York City.**—New York City has within recent years adopted the policy of direct municipal employment in the Street Cleaning Department. The results of this experiment have been very satisfactory, especially in the direction of maintaining satisfactory relations with the men employed. The commissioner of street cleaning has encouraged the formation of a union among the sweepers and drivers. A "Board of Conference," consists of five representatives of this union, the general superintendent of street cleaning, the chief clerk, one district superintendent, one section foreman and one stable foreman. At the meetings of this board "everything connected with the work, the relations with the commissioner and his subordinates, and all questions of discipline, duties, pay, etc., in which they are interested," are discussed with perfect freedom. This board elects a permanent chairman and a secretary; one of these is chosen from the five representatives of the labor union. In case the board cannot come to an agreement, the chairman and secretary argue the case before the commissioner, who is then to give a final decision. This board has been in active operation little over a year. During this period it has been very successful in maintaining amicable relations between the men and the superintending officials.

*Mayorality Election.* The election of the first mayor for Greater New York has been one of the most interesting in the history of American municipalities. For the first time, the issue between those who believe in independent municipal parties and the regular national and state political organizations, was definitely drawn. The election of 1894, while marking a definite step in this direction, was in no sense conclusive as to the possibility of electing officials on strictly local issues. The union of the Independent Citizens' movement with the regular Republican organization was in the nature of a compromise, and as is the case with most compromises, failed to decide the real issue. Those who have closely watched the reform movement in New York City during the last few years, are of the opinion that the compromise then effected with the Republican party rather weakened than strengthened the development of an independent local party. When, therefore, it became a question of nominating candidates for the now consolidated Greater New York, the feeling of those who had led the reform movement in the previous election was, that the Independent Citizens' party should make the attempt to stand on its own feet unhampered by any alliances with other political organizations. For this purpose a popular organization was formed, embracing members in all parts of the territory of the new municipality. The new organization took the name of Citizens' Union. The spirit that pervaded it from the very beginning was that of complete independence from either of the regularly organized national parties. Before any of the other parties had taken action, the Citizens' Union nominated Hon. Seth Low for mayor, who accepted the nomination. The Union refused to enter into any conferences with the Republican party, which for a time seemed disposed to place Mr. Low on their ticket. As a result of this independent stand taken by the new organization and because of the further declaration that the Citizens' Union intended to nominate candidates for the minor offices, the Republican party determined to place the full quota of its own candidates in the field, and nominated General Benjamin F. Tracy for the mayorality.

The Tammany organization of the Democratic party, having nominated its candidates, there were three tickets in the field. To add to the complexity and uncertainty of the situation, the Bryan or Silver Democrats nominated Henry George for mayor, and also a full list of candidates for the other offices. Finally, another faction of the Democratic party, known as the O'Brien Democrats, nominated an independent ticket. The large vote cast for the Citizens' Union has proven to the people of New York as well as to the other

cities of the United States, that it is possible to reconcile a large part of our population with the idea that candidates for local office are to be judged on the basis of their fitness for the same, and that the views of candidates are to be judged with reference to local, rather than national or state issues. A victory for this independent municipal party would have been a victory of national rather than local importance. As it is, a strong incentive has been given to similar organizations throughout the country.

**Brooklyn.**—*Consolidation and Brooklyn Finances.*\* The charter of New York, under which Brooklyn will be governed after January 1, provides that the enlarged city shall assume all the debts and obligations of all the communities absorbed. This means that the new city will assume the responsibility of paying the present Brooklyn debt. The charter also provides that the tax rate and assessment shall be uniform throughout the consolidated territory. This means that as Brooklyn's debt is greater in proportion to the assessed value of the property in the city than New York's debt, the taxpayers in the present city of New York will have to pay a part of the Brooklyn debt. As Brooklyn property is assessed on a valuation of 70 per cent and New York property on a valuation of 50 per cent, an equalization of the assessment will benefit Brooklyn taxpayers. It has been estimated that this benefit will amount to \$8 or \$10 on every \$1000 of assessed valuation. In 1898 the people of Brooklyn will pay no taxes. At present Brooklynites pay their taxes in advance at the beginning of the year, in New York taxes are paid at the end of the year after the money (which has been raised on city certificates) has been spent. That taxes may be collected at the same time this adjustment has to be made.

**Philadelphia.**—*Report on Water Supply.* The Director of Public Works has just published an exhaustive report on the water supply of the city. During the last few years the sentiment against the continuance of the present sources of supply has been growing, and a number of investigations have been undertaken with a view to ascertaining other available sources in the vicinity. Surveys have been made of a number of districts, some of which have been reported favorably by committees of councils. In all cases, however, the cost of obtaining pure water from these new districts was not less than \$15,000,000 and in some cases exceeded \$30,000,000. The recent improvement in methods of filtration has again turned attention to the possibilities of the present supply, and has, to a certain extent, reconciled the opponents of the present system with the idea of further utilizing the actual sources.

\*Communication of F. H. Gunnison, Esq.

The Director of Public Works, after careful examination, is led to the conclusion that the "future demands for a municipal water supply will not make it necessary to seek any source other than the waters of the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers." Filtration, in the opinion of the director, has become an absolute necessity, for the water taken from the Delaware river is unfit for use in its natural state. Upon the subject of filtration, the director favors a system of sand filters, to be constructed and owned by the city. As to the cost of construction, the estimates submitted to the department differ greatly. The minimum cost would probably be \$20,000 per million gallons of filtering capacity per twenty-four hours. This includes the cost of the land. Upon this basis a 400,000,000 gallon plant, which would be required by the city, would cost from \$8,000,000 to \$10,000,000. As regards the cost of maintenance, which is an important item in the sand filtration system, one of the companies offers to do the work for \$1.85 per million gallons.

*Leasing of the Gas Works.* For a number of years past offers have been made to the city of Philadelphia by various private corporations looking toward the leasing of the gas works now owned and operated by the city. Although under the city's management the price of gas has been steadily decreasing, it has been felt that the quality was not up to the standard which improved methods of production demand. It was not until recently, however, that the offers were seriously considered, either by councils or the public at large. Within the last few months, however, several powerful corporations have renewed their offers, and not only have these offers been considered by the finance committee of councils, but the committee has favorably recommended one of the propositions for acceptance by the city. The outlook at the present time is that the city's plant will be handed over to a private corporation on a long-term lease. The proposition has aroused considerable opposition among the citizens. The gas works have been in the hands of the city since 1841, but it was not until 1885 that a form of responsible management was adopted. During the period between 1841 and 1885, the management of the gas works was vested in a board of trustees with whose policy councils was unable to interfere. The courts held that to permit the interference of councils would destroy the guarantee of the bondholders who had taken the bonds on the faith of continued management by the board originally vested with the management of the gas works. The period of incompetency and corruption which marked the rule of the Gas Trust, has remained one of the dark chapters in the municipal history of Philadelphia, and accounts to a large extent for the

feeling of distrust of the population toward public management. Since 1885, however, the gas works have been under the control of one of the responsible departments of the city government. Since that time there has been a steady improvement in the quality of gas, while the price has been reduced from \$1.75 to one dollar.

One of the great difficulties with which the Department of Public Works has had to contend, has been the steady refusal of councils to make appropriations sufficient for the improvement of the plant. It is true, that the large indebtedness of the city of Philadelphia, together with the fact that it has nearly reached the limit prescribed in the constitution, offered a certain excuse for the inaction of councils, although a close examination of the facts will show that the excuse has been used to permit private corporations to absorb the most profitable part of the city's gas making. Councils have largely impaired the financial position of the works through contracts with private companies to furnish water-gas at a price far above the cost of manufacture. It is estimated that water-gas can be placed in holders at from twenty to twenty-five cents per thousand cubic feet, whereas the city pays thirty-seven cents. While, therefore, the condition of the gas works, so far as it is unsatisfactory at the present time, is due to the short-sighted policy of councils, the means of improvement are clear to every one, as is also the possibility of making this the most profitable of the city's public works. From a purely business standpoint, therefore, the proposition to lease the city's works ought not to be entertained unless the lessee offers an equivalent for the value of the franchise. The question whether the city should, under any circumstances, divest itself of so distinctly a public function as the supply of gas for public and private purposes, is one into which we cannot enter at present. Suffice it to say that, in addition to the question of possible profit, there is the broader question of the social function of the municipality in the administration of public works of this character. Thus, the experience of the English cities has shown that through the reduction of the price of gas to little more than its cost of production, the city is able to exert a far-reaching influence on the social and industrial life of the community. Thus, with gas at fifty-four cents per thousand cubic feet as in Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham, the gas stove supplants the wasteful coal stove, and the introduction of the gas-motor furnishes the possibility of successful competition by the small manufacturer as against the large producer. But, even disregarding these more general questions of public policy, none of the offers made up to the present time would assure to the city anything like an adequate return for the franchise of exclusive supply of gas

in a great city like Philadelphia. The offer of one company is as follows: First, the company is to have the exclusive privilege of supplying gas for public and private purposes for a period of thirty years; secondly, the company agrees to expend within three years \$5,000,000 for the alteration, replacement, improvement, maintenance, repair, extension and betterment of the work and at least \$15,000,000 during the period of the lease; third, the company is to supply the city with seven hundred million cubic feet of gas free of charge; fourth, the price of gas is to be gradually reduced during the period of thirty years from \$1 to 75 cents, the reduction to be dependent upon ordinance of councils requiring the same; fifth, in case the price is maintained at \$1, the city is to receive an annual rental of from 10 to 25 cents per thousand cubic feet; sixth, the city of Philadelphia, at the end of the term, namely, December 31, 1927, "to receive the works without charge in the condition of alteration, improvement and change in which the same shall then exist."

A careful examination of the provisions of the lease will show that in most cases the advantages offered are illusory rather than real. The long term of the lease makes it, in effect, a sale of the Gas Works; the provision of expenditure of \$5,000,000 may be practically nullified because of the presence of the word "maintenance," which might mean the ordinary running expenses of the plant. As regards the offer to furnish the city with seven hundred million of cubic feet of gas free of charge, it must be remembered that in 1896 the city used over six hundred and seventy-four million cubic feet, and that with the ordinary rate of increase the year 1897 will bring the public consumption of gas above seven hundred million cubic feet. In other words, from the very beginning of the lease the city will become a purchaser of gas. According to the terms of the proposed lease, the price of gas during the entire period will never go below 75 cents. When it is remembered that a construction company offered to place gas in the holders of the city for 25 cents per thousand cubic feet, and that according to the estimates of experts the cost of distribution should not exceed 10 cents, the enormous profits which the company will derive from the franchise are apparent. That the various corporations are fully aware of the possibility of such profits is proven by the fact that another responsible company offered to abide by all the provisions of the United Gas Improvement Company's offer described above, and in addition to pay to the city annual rentals aggregating \$37,500,000 during the thirty years. Unfortunately, however, the United Gas Improvement Company, for some reason or other, seems to have the exclusive monopoly of the committee's interest and attention.

It is possible that when the leasing ordinance is submitted to the two branches of councils, the provisions may be modified. In fact, the upper branch adopted a resolution to submit the leasing of the works to the people at the Fall election, but the lower body voted against it. Whatever the outcome, the agitation has had the effect of calling the attention of the citizens to the hostile attitude of councils towards the improvement of the gas works. It has aroused an interest in municipal affairs such as Philadelphia has not witnessed for many years. A considerable portion of the population feel that the leasing of the gas works means the abandonment of a distinctly public function; that to this extent it diminishes the prestige of the city government and tends to increase that apathy of the population which has been the cause of so much municipal mismanagement.

**Cleveland.\*—*Street Railway Fares.*** The city administration has precipitated a fight with the street railway companies through the threat to regulate fares. An ordinance was introduced some weeks ago providing for the reduction of fares to three cents on one of the lines. A citizens' committee of five was appointed by the council to confer with the street railroads in the hope of a compromise, but the committee declined to serve. The contest remains the absorbing topic of interest in council proceedings, and at the present writing there is considerable probability that the friends of the ordinance will muster sufficient force to pass it. Meetings have been held almost nightly in the various wards of the city, and an immense amount of popular clamor and enthusiasm has been raised in favor of the ordinance. The railway companies naturally oppose the measure and insist that the ordinance would be illegal if passed. The city, on the other hand, maintains that the right to reduce fares is a reserved one existing in favor of the city in the original grants made to individual lines which have since been consolidated. In case the ordinance is passed, it will probably be carried to the courts, and, as was the case in the gas fight of some years ago, when the rates of illuminating gas were reduced to 80 cents per thousand, the issue will probably be determined on the ground of the reasonableness of the ordinance and the rate of fare.

The Big Consolidated road, which is not interested in the present ordinance, has made offers of compromise on the ground that, while denying any right of the city to make such a change, they desire to adjust the matter amicably rather than incur the hostility of the public by a prolonged fight. As a concession, they have offered universal transfers over all the roads of the city and 5 per cent of

\*Communication of Frederic C. Howe, Esq.



their gross earnings, on condition that they receive certain extensions of their grants. At the present time the roads sell eleven tickets for fifty cents, and pave about fifteen feet of the roadway.

*Municipal Association.*—The Municipal Association, which is a body of business and professional men of the city, has been devoting itself of late to an investigation of the finances of the county and the county commissioners. A report of the secretary based upon a thorough examination shows the wildest extravagance in their expenditures; that money is expended for the advancement of personal and political ends, and that the county for years has been systematically defrauded by contractors and other interested persons. An examining committee of two thoroughly competent men has been appointed by the Common Pleas Court, and it is hoped that their report will bring about some change in existing conditions. The expenditures of the commissioners amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually and they are made without publicity, competitive bids or contracts.

The Municipal Association is also advancing the cause of civil service reform in the state. A bill has been drafted, and with the co-operation of other organizations such as the State Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Trade, etc., hopes to secure its passage by the legislature, which meets in January.

*Washington.*—*Charities.* In the Department of Public Charities important steps in the direction of progress have been taken. For some time the question of the advisability of continuing the granting of public moneys to private charities has been considered by Congress. An act was passed—to take effect the coming fiscal year—prohibiting the granting of public money to sectarian institutions. A congressional joint-committee is engaged at the present time in investigating the charities of the District. Recently a new Superintendent of Charities has been appointed who is especially trained in sociological and charitable work. The first changes proposed by him are contained in his estimates for the ensuing year—just submitted to the District Commissioners. The proposed change is in conformity with the law passed by Congress, and advocates the abandonment of the granting of public subsidies to private institutions, and the adoption of the plan of accomplishing the public work through public agencies, at all times under the control of public authority.

*California.*—The tendency toward central control of municipalities in the granting of franchises, is illustrated by a law recently passed by the Legislature of California. According to the provisions of the act, every franchise to telegraph or telephone companies, street

railroads, gas, water, electric power or light companies, must be sold at auction at a certain percentage of the gross receipts. The amount must not be less than three per cent. The law permits the local authorities to remit such payment during the first five years of operation. A singular omission of the act is the failure to specify the duration of the franchise. Local authorities are thus at liberty to grant a franchise for an indefinite period.

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FOREIGN CITIES.

**London.**—The committee appointed to investigate the charges against the "Works Department" of the London County Council, has published a report containing an exhaustive discussion of the relation of the municipal authorities to the execution of public works. The department officials were charged with having so arranged the accounts as to show a more favorable condition of certain portions of the work than was justified by the facts. This, it was claimed, had been done by the transference of items from one account to another. In the report the committee finds that these charges are substantially true; that a number of fictitious entries, amounting to about \$36,000, had been made, with a resulting falsification of the cost of certain public works, the apparent cost of some being decreased by amounts which were included in the cost of others. No direct misappropriation of the funds was discovered. While severely criticising these financial transactions, the committee strongly defends the policy of the council in extending the system of direct employment of labor. The investigation shows but little to discredit the system. With a few additional safeguards, the dangers at present involved can be, to a large extent, eliminated.

The establishment of the Works Department was the direct result of the new labor policy of the council inaugurated in 1889. The wages and hours of labor of the employes of contractors were prescribed by the council and inserted in the contracts for public work. This policy led to difficulties in securing bids. The council then resolved to establish an independent Department of Works which should undertake the work of repairs and also the construction of a certain portion of new public works. During the year 1892 a number of sewers were constructed by the department. It was found that although the "labor clauses" were maintained the cost was less than that of the lowest bidding contractor. Soon after the economy of the new method was proven, the construction of repair shops in different portions of the metropolitan area and the maintenance of a permanent force were authorized. The Works Department now

extended its operations to the construction of laborers' dwellings, hospitals, fire stations, etc. The results were uniformly favorable. Recently, suspicions of unwarranted financial operations were aroused. The opponents of direct execution of public works by the municipality led a violent attack against the policy of the council. The appointment of a committee of investigation and the report here mentioned followed. On the whole, it may be said that the report fully vindicates the policy of the council. The committee advocates the maintenance of the system, recommending certain changes in organization. A Works Board, composed of representatives from the nine important committees of the county council, is to be established, to which shall be referred propositions of individual committees desiring work to be done without the intervention of the contractor. Under the direction of this works board, a works manager is to carry out the plans referred to him by this board. The minority of the committee recommend the abolition of the whole system of direct municipal management, and advocate a strict adherence to the contract system.

**Toronto.**—Within recent years the city of Toronto has been attracting much attention through the adoption of this policy in connection with the highway department. The results of this work are stated in the following communication received from the street commissioner, Mr. John Jones. Speaking of the work accomplished under his administration of the department, Mr. Jones says:

“As to its practical operation I am aware of several objections advanced in some quarters against it. Firstly, it is contended that the shrewdness, enterprise and kindred qualities manifested by private firms and corporations in the conduct of their business is lacking to a greater or lesser degree in the performance and supervision of public works by officials acting on behalf of the citizens; in other words that there is a certain perfunctoriness displayed by the latter which is inimical to the highest success. Another objection is that there are too many opportunities afforded for official speculation in connection with positions involving large expenditure, and the disposal of wide patronage. A third contention is that men employed on public undertakings will not yield the same service as when employed by private firms.

“The first two having a certain relationship may be treated together. That they have some weight will not be denied; but that they are insuperable is being disproved every day in scores of municipalities, notably Glasgow and Birmingham, the former particularly. Honest, capable men are to be found in every community who would be glad to give their best services in the interests of their fellow-citizens if the continuity of their positions were assured, and they could rely on being allowed an absolutely free hand in the

discharge of their duties, and to stand or fall by their achievements. For my part I will undertake to perform any branch of our work quite as well, and more cheaply, than if done under private contract, providing the conditions are equal. The third objection I shall deal with later.

"I come now to speak of our experience in regard to the direct employment of day labor. Prior to about the year 1873, everything of a public nature with the exception of street cleaning and scavenging was done under the contract system. In that year a department was organized by the council under the name of the City Commissioner's Department, having charge of general street matters. That date marks the commencement of a movement towards extending public control, which is but another name for the employment of day labor, and it has proceeded steadily up to the present time. About ten years ago my own department was organized, all street matters then or subsequently being placed under it. On my appointment to the position of street commissioner I determined to maintain and extend the principle of direct control of all branches of work placed in my charge, as opportunity offered, and I think I may affirm in all modesty that my efforts have been to some extent successful. When I took charge of the services of street cleaning, scavenging and street watering, they had been brought completely under civic control, but the "hire" system generally prevailed, that is, a very considerable portion of the work was done by carts and teams hired from private parties. Even this was ahead of the contract system, but it had many drawbacks; for instance, it gave opportunity for wirepulling and log-rolling to obtain an extra share of the work, and carts and teams would be recommended by alderman and other influential people which were unfit for our purpose. Another drawback was the lack of continuity in the performance of the work, arising from the constant changing of the men, thus making it next to impossible to locate derelictions of duty. The corporation at that time owned a considerable number of wagons, sweepers, horses, etc.; but there was no provision for renewing or repairing same, everything being supplied by local firms and tradesmen. It will readily be understood what scrambling there was for patronage, resulting in high priced and grossly inferior work. These things I set myself to reform. At the present time we own over one hundred horses, fully equipped, which are boarded in three stables erected in various parts of the city. We own a full street sweeping, street watering and scavenging plant, all of which are manufactured at our shops. The "hire" system is nearly, not quite, abolished so far as these very important services are concerned. It must not be supposed, however, that all this was

achieved without opposition. Tradesmen, the laboring element, owners of carts, and a certain section of the aldermen, have bitterly attacked every change, the latter chiefly because of the pressure brought to bear upon them by those of their constituents who were annoyed to see a fruitful source of revenue cut off. The agitation to revert to the former system has still some life in it, but the citizens themselves may be trusted to prevent its success, since it has been plainly demonstrated that the present system is superior from every point of view.

“Regarding other branches of public work outside of the services just dealt with, comprising sidewalk, sewer and water-works construction, the first two only are controlled by this department, the latter two belonging to separate departments. All sidewalks are constructed under municipal control with the exception of those composed of a patent cement, known as “granolithic,” which is controlled by a private firm. Walks of this character are laid wherever the property owners petition for same, the cost being borne by the persons whose properties are benefited.

“Roadways, generally speaking, are constructed under the contract system. Now and then we put down a pavement, but the opposition from the contracting element is too strong yet to allow of the day labor system making much headway. It may be asked why with the advantages of a partial system of day labor, such as I have above referred to, in plain view, there should be any difficulty in extending its operations? The answer is simply that the department is not allowed to compete on even terms with private firms. The latter are at liberty to employ the best men obtainable. We are not allowed to do so. Times are unfortunately a little bad with us at present, and as a result there is an exceptionable number of unemployed of all trades, in addition to a very large contingent of common laborers, some of them old and infirm. As many of the latter have never done anything but corporation work an opening has to be found for them, otherwise they would starve. The employment of these men would not perhaps be of very great disadvantage if the rate of wages was graded according to their strength and capacity. But it is not permitted us to make any such distinction. A by-law of the council, passed some years ago, provides a minimum rate of fifteen cents per hour for all corporation employes, and although the idea of its promoters was in the main good, and in some respects has been of advantage to the men, in others it has worked the opposite, particularly in the case of the older men, contractors preferring younger men, who are always obtainable. The by-law referred to applies equally to city work done under contract.